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Country-Pop *Now:* An Analysis of Voice and Timbre in the Music of Shania Twain

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Country-Pop *Now:* An Analysis of Voice and Timbre in the Music of Shania Twain

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Country-Pop *Now:* An Analysis of Voice and Timbre in the Music of Shania Twain

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Much discussion in country music scholarship today addresses concerns of authenticity in a musical genre whose commercial development throughout the twentieth century was characterized by stylistic hybridization. Bill Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal point to particular worries that arose starting in the 1950s when country musicians began blending what listeners at the time considered a traditional country sound with stylings of popular music being played on the radio. Joli Jenson likewise details this blending in her work on the subject, which became known as the "Nashville Sound" of the 1950s and 60s. In the ensuing decades, country musicians continued to incorporate instrumentation and production techniques from different styles which further developed sub-genres of country music. Such techniques—while well-documented in research on pop and rock music—remain under-studied in country music research.

In this paper I focus on the sub-genre of country-pop and its contextualization within the larger genre of country music following Eric Drott's conceptualization of genre and its inherent multiplicities. Specifically, I look at the musical career of Canadian singer/songwriter Shania Twain, and the impact of her productional choices on country-pop music from the 1990s onward. By focusing in on aspects of vocal timbre and studio production specifically, this research works to further analytical discussion on the voice by pinpointing intersections of studies in music theory, musicology, gender, feminism, and technology. My analysis of the audible shift in Twain's vocal production from two singles—"Swingin' With My Eyes Closed," and "Life's About to Get Good,"—off of her 2017 album *Now* points at ways Twain and her co-producers manipulate and interact with her sound that align with Asaf Peres's description of sonic density in twenty-first century pop music. These choices act concurrently with Twain's gender presentation and postfeminine stance, marketing her within the ever-evolving sub-genre of country music that is country-pop.

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Introduction: Shania Twain's New Voice

In 2017, Shania Twain ended a fourteen-year break from new musical output with the release of her fifth studio album entitled *Now*. Fans and critics alike highly anticipated the new album, remaining eager to hear the lyrics and musical hooks similar to those that first drew them to her in the mid-1990s.[1] The album delivered, reminding listeners of why Twain had been proclaimed as the "queen of country-pop." There was, however, one noticeable difference in sound from that of her previous albums—her voice. Following the finish of her 2004 world tour, Twain suffered a tick bite which led to the contraction of Lyme disease. The lingering effects of the disease caused damage to her throat, rendering her barely able to speak, let alone sing, for nearly seven years.[2] Additionally, Twain's voice exhibits traits of presbyphonia—the process of change the voice goes through naturally as one ages—altering her sound.

Through the changes in sound vocally, Twain still asserts her place in the country-pop genre with the release of *Now.* By means of analysis of the voice and timbre, this essay points to the prominent perceptible musical factors that position Twain within the ever-evolving genre of country music. After a review of contemporary conversations regarding genre, I examine literature of the voice, including Kate Heidemann's methodological approach of analyzing vocal timbre. Combining this approach with Asaf Peres's work on sonic dimensions of pop music, I analyze two of Twain's singles from the album—"Swingin' With My Eyes Closed" and "Life's About to Get Good"—examining the aspects of timbre brought forth through vocal and studio production

[1] Jamieson Cox, "Shania Twain 'Now:' Review," *Pitchfork*, September 30, 2017, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/shania-twain-now/

[2] Shania Twain, interview by Bobby Bones, *The Bobby Bones Show,* iHeart Radio, October 20, 2017.

techniques. Such techniques highlight ways in which Twain and her music actively participate in the conversations surrounding both country and popular music today.

Genre/Country Crossover

It was my initial goal when undertaking this project to generically position the musical career of Shania Twain along an ever-evolving spectrum of country music. But to simply place a label on her musical stylings only perpetuates the notion of generic categorization as a static, taxonomic endeavor. It fails to recognize the intricate complexities and multiple lenses with which one must approach the topic of genre. Eric Drott addresses such concerns in his article "The End(s) of Genre," in which he proposes alternatively framing genre in a way accounting for its inherent multiplicities.[3] Specifically, Drott examines Gérard Grisey's *Les espaces acoustiques* by drawing on actor-network theory, allowing him to examine the multiple generic contexts in which the piece can be positioned. To do this, one must look at the numerous angles encultured in the human experience of what it means to actively participate, not statically sit, within any genre—including country music.

Country music—like many musical genres—developed as a result of stylistic hybridization. That is, many different sounds and ideas have blended together to form new categories of music marked by different musical characteristics, often labeled as musical sub-genres. And while these sounds and ideas can come together harmoniously, occasionally the juxtaposition of different cultural and personal values that come along with the hybridization of musical styles can create a discord among participants of the larger encapsulating genre. In country music specifically, the

[3] Eric Drott, "The End(s) of Genre," *Journal of Music Theory* 57, no. 1, (2013): 1-45.

different styles emerged from ever-changing values and aesthetics associated with developing audiences of country music over the past century. From its roots, country music has been about both stylization and commercialization. Such an idea doesn't sit well with certain country "purists," who continue to promote true authenticity—an idea that permeates conversation on country music.[4] In fact, Nadine Hubbs attributes "many a tirade on country music" to the lack of acknowledgement by those in and around country of the extreme hybridization that established the genre starting in the 1920s.[5] This hybridization developed along the way, producing different musical styles invoking tastes of folk, blues, gospel, swing, jazz, and popular music.

Bill Malone notes how people began voicing concern over the blending of styles in country music and the genre's ties to commercialization beginning in the 1950s, specifically pointing to Chet Atkins and his alignment with the rock 'n roll sound happening mid-century.[6] And as these ties continued to increase, the developed stylizations of country music—particularly those aligning with a popular sound, which became referred to as "the Nashville Sound"—began to be scrutinized by country listeners for their lack of authenticity and departure from traditional working-class values associated with country music.[7] Such criticisms spurred tension amongst those in the country

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[4] See Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1997); Joli Jenson, *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Country Music Foundation Press and the Vanderbilt Press, 1998); Kristine M. McCusker, "Gendered Stages: Country Music, Authenticity, and the Performance of Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Country Music*, ed. by Travis D. Stimeling, (Oxford University Press, 2017).

[5] Hubbs argues the fact that there really is no one true form of "authentic" country music, point to the irony in the situation while noting that such vast styles in the genre "uphold the core traditions of country music, which was founded on and has been carried forward by stylistic mixture and constant change in response to shifting market demands—that is, what people will pay for." Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2014), 8.

[6] Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music USA*, Third Revised Edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 267.

[7] Jenson provides anecdotal evidence in her work, discussing times when she spoke with people in the country industry during the 1970's about this period, stating: "the country music fans I knew described the 1950's as the decade country music became big business," fearing mostly a blend with commercial popular music of the time. Joli Jenson, *The*

industry and their audiences, which continued throughout the 1970s and 80s. This prompted prominent leaders of the industry to censor relatively radical forms of cultural expression through the ensuing decade—expressions employed by Shania Twain.

When Twain first arrived on the country music scene in Nashville in the early 1990s, her sound combined aspects of traditional country with elements of rock. David McGee, who reviewed Twain's first album *Shania Twain* ('93), commented particularly on the strength of her voice: "Twain works the vocal magic of an assured stylist whose every breath broadens a song's emotional landscape," eventually comparing her to the likes of country powerhouses Tanya Tucker and Trisha Yearwood.[8] However, Twain immediately became a topic of controversy when Country Music Television (CMT) refused to play the music video for her very first single "What Made You Say That" because of her exposed midriff from her cut-off top.[9]

After receiving mild success with her first album, Twain began playing with new, fuller sounds—such as heavily distorted electric guitars and synthesizers—attuned more to pop and rock music. Much of these sounds came about because at this time Twain began working with her future husband and long-time rock producer, Robert "Mutt" Lange, whose knowledge and understanding of the industry greatly influenced her own. As a result, Twain faced backlash from her record label Mercury Records in 1995 when presenting them with demos of her sophomore album, *The Woman*

Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music (Nashville, Tennessee: The Country Music Foundation Press and the Vanderbilt Press, 1998)

[8] David McGee, "Shania Twain, Review," *Rolling Stone* 670, November 1993.

[9] This and other anecdotes from her early career characterizing similar events are detailed throughout her autobiography. For example, Twain recalls the photoshoot on the set of her "Any Man of Mine" music video when the photographer tried steering the shoot in a direction other than Twain's vision. When the photographer persisted in the relentless control of her vision, Twain stood her ground and offered the photographer a direction of her own: to stop "being an asshole." See Shania Twain, *From This Moment On* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc, 2011) 266. See James Mandrell's discussion on Twain's presentation of sexuality in her music videos for similar accounts: James Mandrell, "Shania Twain Shakes Up Country Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 5 (2015): 1015-29.

in Me, claiming some of the sounds weren't "country enough."[10] Despite instances like these, Twain persisted in pushing the boundaries of her country persona into a more blended of country and pop music with her third album, *Come on Over*, released in 1997. This album eventually led to her becoming the highest-selling female artist in terms of album sales in country music, quoted as "forever changing the face of country with her pop crossover appeal" by Billboard.[11]

The 2003 release of Twain's fourth studio album *Up!* further catapulted her crossover appeal. *Up!* was released in three different versions internationally based on geographical location. In the United States, green and red versions of the album (which correspond to country and pop styles, respectively) were released, while elsewhere red and blue versions of the album were released (corresponding to pop and "world" styles, respectively).[12] The album had impressively broad appeal: the album and its most successful single collectively ranked on Hot 200, Hot Country Songs, Billboard Country Albums, and Adult Contemporary charts, hitting number one on both Country Albums and Hot 200 charts.

Much changed for both Twain and the country music industry during her fourteen-year hiatus after her fourth studio album(s) *Up!*. Outside of the studio, Twain got divorced, and—as previously mentioned—contracted Lyme disease. In the intervening years, other country-pop artists continued to push the genre in ways that appealed to broader audiences. For instance, Jocelyn Neal notes the interactions between country and pop in pop culture in its display in singing and talent

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[10] Shania Twain, *From This Moment On* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc, 2011) 260-263.

[11] "Shania Twain's 'Come on Over' Turns 20: The Singer Reflects on Going from Country Sweetheart to Best-Selling Pop Superstar," *Billboard*, November 2, 2017. https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/country/8022830/shania-twain-come-on-over-20th-anniversary-interview

[12] Writers have since referred to the blue album as being in the style of "Indian Classical Film Music," but was also referenced as being "world music." See Jocelyn R. Neal, "Country-Pop Formulae and Craft: Shania Twain's Crossover Appeal" in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. by Walter Everett (Routledge, 2007), 285-311.

competitions.[13] Carrie Underwood's country-rooted persona combined with the powerful vocal stylings of rock, soul, and gospel, propelling her to win the television singing competition *American Idol*. Additionally, groups such as Rascal Flatts, Zac Brown Band, and Lady Antebellum blended musical markings of country and pop, combining traditional country elements such as vocal twang and banjo with harmonic looping and fuller synthesized instrumentation associated with pop and rock.[14]

While groups such as these pushed the boundaries of country music to a more contemporary style aligned with a generally more popular sound, country purists aimed at a renewed interest in traditional notions of what it means to be a country artist. For them, straying from a commercialized presentation of a country-pop aesthetic and returning to an appearance rooted in hillbilly and honky-tonk brought the genre to back to its "authentic" roots.[15] Musicians belonging to this group became part of the "alt-country" movement, which started in the mid 1990's and continues even today. Artists such as Ryan Adams and Lucinda Williams have received notoriety for their success in the alt- scene, coexisting alongside artists such as Shania Twain and Garth Brooks who further forged a path for mainstream country-pop.

After her break from the limelight, Twain continued her country-pop crossover with the release of her fifth studio album *Now* in 2017. And although the album didn't soar to the top of the charts as did her previous album from 2003, *Up!*, Twain did release four singles from her comeback album that all received mild success. The new album release, along with a renewed interest in live

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[13] Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 452-457.

[14] Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 456. Additionally, see Jocelyn R. Neal "The Twang Factor in Country Music" in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music.* ed. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43-64.

[15] Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 399-400.

performance, prompted Twain to play an international tour for the album in 2018, and secure her second career Las Vegas residency which began in the fall of 2019.

While Twain appeared to pick right back up with her country-pop style and musical hooks that, as Jocelyn Neal has noted, propelled her songwriting and artistry to success, there was one aspect of Twain's sound that differed quite drastically on her new album: her vocal timbre.[16] Twain's tone on her fifth studio album is much warmer, sitting in a lower register than before. There is also more grit and roughness to her voice. And it is this particular aspect of Twain's sound, combined with the production techniques of her and her co-producers, that provides an interesting look into the current setting for crossover artists in the industry. A combination of these factors, I propose, points to an intersection with age and gender in music. Particularly in a genre such as country, that continues to grapple with equal gender representation in its industry, as is evidenced by extensive ongoing discussions on the topic.[17] Before examining specific instances of Twain's new vocal sound from the album, I will provide an account of general voice scholarship, along with specific vocal markers of country music. Additionally, I present information on vocal aging—known as presbyphonia—that plays a large role in Twain's altered sound.

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[16] Jocelyn R. Neal, "Country-Pop Formulae and Craft: Shania Twain's Crossover Appeal" in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. by Walter Everett (Routledge, 2007), 285-311.

[17] For example, see Anastasia Tsioulcas, "Country Music Excludes Women, Especially Over Age 40, Study Finds," *npr*, April 5, 2019. https://www.npr.org/2019/04/05/710262673/country-music-excludes-women-especially-over-age-40-study-finds; Marissa R. Moss, "New Study Examines Impact of Country Radio Programming on Women," *Rolling Stone*, April 26, 2019 https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/women-country-radio-airplay-study-827675/; Ken Paulson, "Country Music Sexism: Women Fight for Equality on the Airwaves, and Country Radio Shrugs," *USA Today*, February 24, 2020 https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/02/24/country-music-sexism-women-artists-fight-discrimination-column/4820142002/

The Female Voice/Presbyphonia

Over the past decade, scholars have shown increasing interest in the voice as a site of exploration. Through it, Rings, Davies, Feldman, Kane, Malawey, and others have found a means to address deep questions of musical communication and meaning.[18] Many of these explorations draw from the work of philosophers such as Lacan and Derrida, who have noted ways in which the voice plays a prominent role in psychological and societal contexts. In musicological research, however, this is largely new terrain, given the relatively recent shift toward the study of specific sound qualities (timbre) as more than a secondary musical parameter. For instance, in her dissertation on analyzing timbre, Megan Lavengood notes how continued emphasis on training in the style of Western art music tends to favor analysis of primary musical parameters: those than can be expressed through traditional musical notation such as harmony and form. Methods of analyzing timbre fall largely outside the realm of standard notation and have, therefore, been referred to as secondary musical parameters. The relatively recent peak in interest in the study of popular music has since fostered a discussion on utilizing tools to analyze aspects of music other than those readily marked in standard musical notation such as timbre.[19] Additionally, the convergence of voice studies in the realm of musicology can be largely attributed to feminist and queer studies by scholars such as Susan McClary, Suzanne Cusick and Carolyn Abbate, who deal predominantly with the role of voice in opera.[20]

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[18] Martha Feldman, Emily Wilbourne, Steven Rings, Brian Kane, James Q. Davies, "Why Voice Now?" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3, (Fall 2015): 653-685. Also forthcoming, Victoria Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word: Analyzing the Popular Singing Voice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, July 2020).

[19] Megan Lavengood, "A New Approach to the Analysis of Timbre," (dissertation, The City University of New York, 2017).

[20] See for example: Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Suzanne Cusick, "Gendering Modern Music: Thoughts on the Monteverdi-Artusi Controversy," *Journal of the American*

Moreover, scholars such as Jocelyn Neal, Leigh Edwards, and Kate Heidemann have examined the construction of voice in relation to gender in country music. Jocelyn Neal's work on vocal twang looks at the onset and sustained production of vocal sounds that have come to define the country music genre.[21] Leigh Edwards further focuses specifically on Parton, dealing with aspects of Parton's singing that she uses to gender her performance.[22] Kate Heidemann's research on the performance of identity in songs by Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton analyzes the vocal performances of the two artists, noting their cultural impact on female country performers throughout the 60s and 70s.[23] She also notes, in particular, the narrative implications of Parton and Lynn's lyrics that portrayed ideas of femininity in two different yet powerful ways, strongly resonating with listeners and providing proof that women could be singer/songwriters in their own right. The focus in research on Parton and Lynn details a shift in perspectives on women in the country music industry during the late 1960s and early 1970s, marking the beginning of a change where women could be seen as more than just a solo opening act. Such movements paralleled the larger movement of second wave feminism that focused extensively on women's rights related to the workforce happening in the United States at the time.

Of the analytical discourse on vocal production, Heidemann provides the clearest and most succinct method of analyzing the technical aspect of singing. Her dissertation outlines an analytical

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Musicological Society 46, no. 1, (Spring 1993): 1-25; and Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[21] See both Jocelyn R. Neal, "The Twang Factor in Country Music" in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music.* ed. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), and Jocelyn R. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 29 no. 1 (2007): 41–72.

[22] Leigh Edwards, "'Backwoods Barbie': Dolly Parton's Gender Performance" in *Dolly Parton, Gender, and Country Music* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018).

[23] Kate Heidemann, "Remarkable Women and Ordinary Gals: Performance of Identity in Songs by Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton." *Country Boys and Redneck Women.* ed. Diane Pecknold and Kristine McCusker, (The University of Mississippi Press, 2016).

framework combined with concepts of critical theory that work together to show presentation of femininity in country and soul music.[24] Heidemann furthers her model in her 2016 *Music Theory Online* article on analyzing vocal timbre in pop songs. She lists three main ways in which to describe timbre: in terms of perceptual, physiological, and acoustic characteristics. Focusing on the perceptual in her analysis, Heidemann concludes that describing the ways in which one perceives vocal timbre offers "the most intriguing realm for those of us interested in achieving a holistic understanding of how sounds elicit different states of arousal and emotion, and come to acquire meaning."[25] It is my aim to apply such a means of interpretation to the music of Shania Twain, focusing on the place of her uniquely different timbre in the context of country-pop. Important to understanding the changes in Twain's sound requires an overview of some of the physiological changes caused by presbyphonia.

The term *presbyphonia* can have two different meanings, depending on the context of the situation in which the term is being used. In general terms, presbyphonia stands in as a catch-all when talking about general vocal disorders—any ailment to the production of the voice can be referred to by the term. More specifically, and the way to which I refer it in the present study, presbyphonia is used to describe the overall aging of a person's voice and, consequently, their vocal production. Additionally, presbyphonia is characterized by changes in physiology corresponding to hormonal changes occurred by humans as they age. Presbyphonia is characterized mainly by the

[24] Kate Heidemann, "Hearing Women's Voices in Popular Song: Analyzing Sound and Identity in Country and Soul," (dissertation, Columbia University, 2014).
[25] Kate Heidemann, "A System for Describing Vocal Timbre in Popular Song," *Music Theory Online* 22, no. 1, (March 2016).

way in which it affects two components of vocal production: the pulmonary bellows and the vocal tract. I will address each of these elements in turn.[26]

The pulmonary bellows refers to the physical components of the thoracic cavity that help humans breathe and speak, including the lungs, diaphragm, ribs, intercostal muscles, and sternum. The primary job of the pulmonary bellows is to allow for respiration and the transfer of oxygen to the blood and rest of the body. Secondarily, the pulmonary bellows allow for the transfer of air through the vocal tract and vocal folds which results in phonation. By manipulating the pressure and rate in which this air travels, human beings have discovered how to produce, control, and sustain specific pitched sounds: the foundation for singing. During presbyphonia, the muscles of the pulmonary bellows weaken, resulting in a relaxed posture and, therefore, lessening the ability to support the air necessary for singing. What results is an unsupported sound, characterized by breathiness of tone and overall less powerful vocal delivery.

The second component of vocal production affected by presbyphonia occurs through changes to a person's overall vocal tract as they age. Here, the vocal tract refers to components of vocal production from the throat up: namely, the esophagus, vocal cords, epiglottis, and the oral cavity (hard/soft palate, teeth, lips, and nasal passages). Manipulation of all these components allow for singers to control pitch, tone, and timbre, barring any physical limitations. Two significant changes happen to the vocal tract during presbyphonia. Firstly, the larynx continues to lower as humans age, which results in the production of lower formants in a person's sound.[27] Often times,

[26] The compiled information on presbyphonia here all comes from a 2017 study on the subject. See Caterina Bruzzi, Daria Salsi, Domenico Minghetti, Maurizio Negri, Delfo Casolino, and Michele Sessa, "Presbyphonia" *Acta Biomed* 88, no. 1, (April 2017): 6-10.

[27] Formants are not easily defined, but when talking about formants as a vocalist, they are often spoken about as the resultant sounds that occur due to the choice in placement and shape along the vocal tract while speaking or singing.

this is perceived to listeners as a singer being flat or under-pitch, even though acoustically they are singing the intended fundamental frequency. Secondly, changes in sound occur because of the sagging of the nose over time due to the loss of collagen in the body, in addition to general accumulation of larger amounts of fat to the neck and throat area.

Additionally, hormonal changes that occur as humans age cause physiological changes that affect the thickness of the vocal folds. Specifically in women, aging generally results in a lowering of estrogen levels and an increase in androgen levels. This, in turn, leads to a thickening of the vocal cords, lowering the overall frequency of female voices as they age. The increased thickness of the vocal folds also alters timbral characteristics of the voice. Together, these changes are often referred to by medical researchers as the "virilization" of the voice.[28]

The effects of presbyphonia on Twain's sound should not be seen as a degradation of her musical ability. To say Twain is unable to sing powerfully and in a compelling manner is far from the truth. Her sound is simply different than it once was given the physiological changes her body occurred through presbyphonia. Due to her new sound, Twain and her co-producers take active steps in engaging and manipulating Twain's vocal production to create a sound conducive to her country-pop positioning. The following analysis of one of the four singles off of Twain's *Now* album, "Swingin' With My Eyes Closed," highlights such effects.

Formants predominantly refer to the way a certain vowel sounds based on the acoustic characteristics determined by a vocalist's production technique.

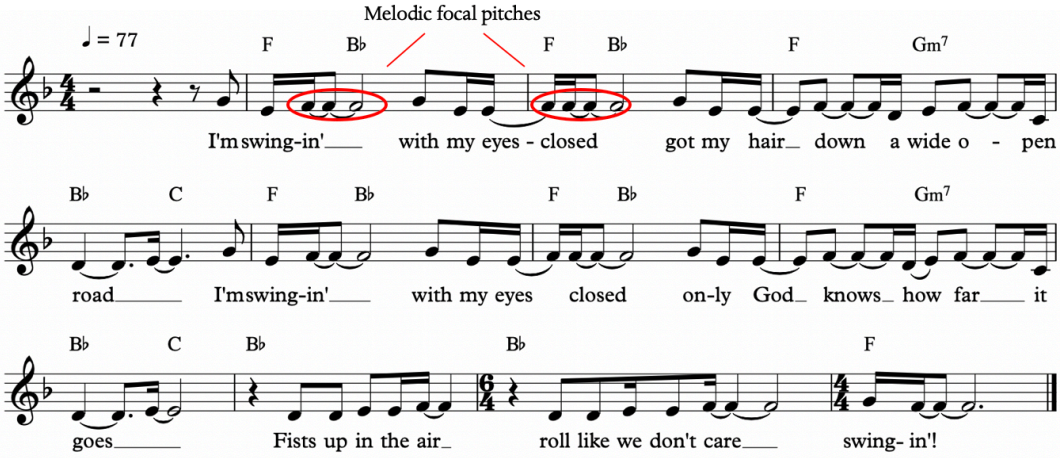
[28] For example, see Eliséa Maria Meurer, Maria Celeste Osório Wender, Helena von Eye Corleta, and Edison Capp, "Phono-articulatory Variations of Women in Reproductive Age and Postmenopausal," *Journal of Voice* 18, No. 3, (September 2004): 369-374.

"Swingin' With My Eyes Closed"

Following a divorce from her husband, co-writer, and producer Robert "Mutt" Lange, Shania Twain suffered severe vocal damage after contracting Lyme disease from a tick bite. As previously mentioned, this experience affected her ability to phonate, leaving her unable to speak or sing for multiple years. Lyme disease does not generally affect the vocal system—rather, it generally results in a skin rash accompanied by slight pain or fatigue. However, in extreme cases Lyme disease can cause lingering and even permanent effects that act similarly to those of auto-immune diseases. In Twain's case, this particular iteration of the illness rendered her unable to perform as a vocalist. Fortunately, numerous "open-throat" vocal surgeries and vocal therapy allowed Twain to regain her ability to speak and sing. However, the muscular damage caused to Twain's throat from the disease, in addition to presbyphonia left her voice significantly weakened and registrally lowered. As a result, there is a clear difference in her vocal production and timbral qualities on her long-anticipated fifth studio album *Now,* released in 2017. Analysis of sonic characteristics of the opening track "Swingin' With My Eyes Closed," hereafter referred to as "Swingin'," highlights the combination of studio production, recording, and vocal production techniques used by Twain and her co-producer Ron Aniello to strengthen the sounding quality of Twain's voice.

The most common vocal production technique in a singer's arsenal that shows their strength is their ability to "belt." Belting is the act of extending the lower-ranged "chest" voice up into a higher range – one that would normally call for a shift in register to a singer's lighter "head" voice. Often, the higher a singer is able to belt, the more power they are perceived to have. In her 2003 album, *Up!*, Twain at one point reaches a peak belting point of a D#5 ("Thank You Baby [For Making Someday Come So Soon] 3:36-3:40, *Up!* 2003). And although this is a relatively brief

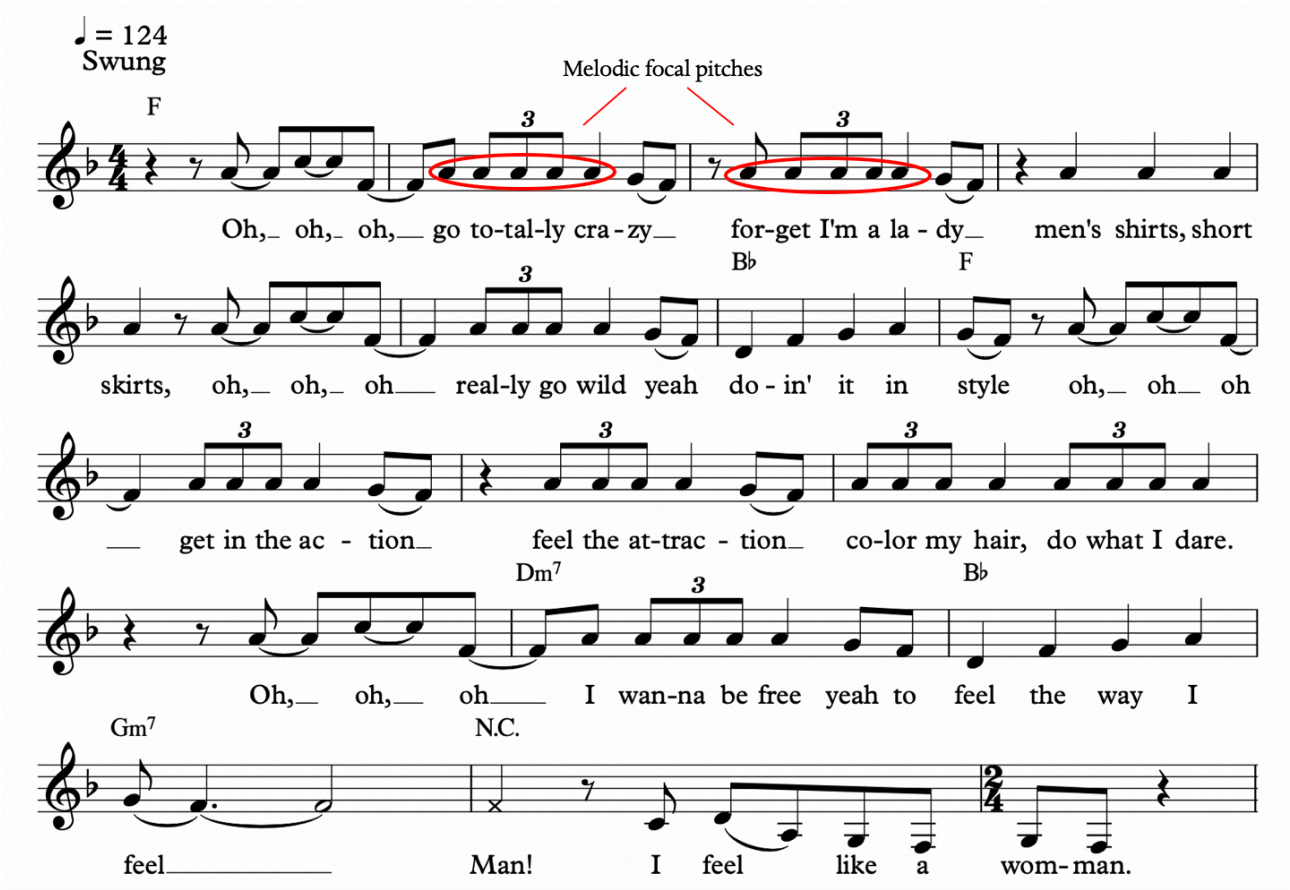
moment, her ability to belt to this specific pitch nonetheless displays an impressive range. In "Swingin'" Twain's belt is limited to a tritone below the D#5 moment, with a quick instance of an A4 in the bridge of the song ("Swingin' With My Eyes Closed" 2:43-2:50, *Now* 2017). In the phrase "Only God knows, how far it goes," Twain's climactic belt pitch on the A4 falls on the "how" of "how far." Despite its placement on the metric downbeat, the A4 fails to have the impact of the D#5 due to its lower range. Additionally, the vocal scoop up to the pitch makes the perceived attack weaker. It is as if the power to reach the note on attack is not there, so the note must be approached from a lower pitch. The heavy filtering in the production, too, masks the overall effect of her belt. Together, these define Twain's noticeably lowered vocal range.



Example 1 – "Swingin' With My Eyes Closed" chorus, Now *2017.*

While the previous examples show relatively brief moments in their respective contexts, Twain also makes adjustments to the broader melodic song range as well that suggest a weakened voice. In order to produce sustained moments of belt, Twain lowers the central pitch of focus even further due to her lowered range. Looking at what I define as the primary "focal pitch" of a melodic phrase, that being the primary pitch of focus in a group of notes in any given phrase, there's a clear

descent in register from Twain's focal pitches on tracks of previous albums. For instance, Example 1 shows the primary focal pitch in the choruses of "Swingin'" is an F4. The melodic phrases of the chorus span the interval of a third from E4 to G4, with F4 being the focal pitch surrounded by an upper and lower neighbor tone. Compared with the melodic focal pitch in Example 2 of her popular single from 1997 "Man! I Feel Like a Woman," ("Man! I Feel…") it's clear to see the registral descent from her previous albums to *Now*. The two songs are in the same key for their respective choruses (F Major), but rather than the tonic focal pitch on F4 as used in the "Swingin'" example, Twain's focal pitch in "Man! I Feel…" is featured prominently on A4. The drawn-out repetitions on the A4 contrasts with the brief moment previously described in the bridge of "Swingin'."



Example 2 – "Man! I Feel Like a Woman" chorus, Come on Over *1997.*

Although it is clear that her vocal range has lowered as a result of both the presbyphonia and muscular deterioration from Lyme disease, one should note Twain's continued choice to belt and what this says about her musical choices as an artist in accordance with the country-pop genre. As Stephanie Vander Wel notes, the extension of chest voice into the upper region of a singer's range is often associated with acoustic tension. The "belt" sound that results has been, in turn, connected to working class principles long associated with the country genre.[29] Other country-pop artists, such as Faith Hill, have been documented using similar vocal belt in strong combination with her regional southern accent to further promote the crossover genre.[30] Conveying power and strength in the voice through belting often correlates with the lyrical content and message of the song being performed. Twain's belt aligns with the message she intends to deliver through the song's lyrics. Although weakened, Twain's belt features prominently in many of her songs on the *Now* album particularly when it's used in combination with powerful lyrics to bolster the song's narrative—as it is in "Swingin'."

Additionally, the specific production and recording techniques used by Twain and her co-producer Ron Aniello affect the overall sonic density in particular areas of "Swingin'," thickening the texture of Twain's voice and the accompanying instrumentation. What results is the perception of differing timbres, an overall sonic fullness, in the choruses of "Swingin'" that places Twain and Aniello's track at the center of the ever-evolving continuum of country-pop music. Before looking at the track specifically, I will briefly explain the techniques used in this analysis.

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[29] Stephanie Vander Well "The Singing Voice in Country Music" in *The Oxford Handbook of Country Music*, ed. by Travis D. Stimeling, (Oxford University Press, 2017): 158-159.

[30] Jocelyn R. Neal, "The Voice Behind the Song: Faith Hill, Country Music, and Reflexive Identity," in *The Women of Country Music: A Reader*, ed. James Akenson and Charles Wolfe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 109-130.

Spectrogram analysis allows for the visualization of a track's sonic textures as well as prominence of specific instruments and voices within a recording. For this analysis, I present two different types of spectrograms: a general spectrogram which shows the overall sonic density of the track, and a melodic spectrogram which highlights prominent fundamental frequencies of the lines played or sung by different instruments.[31] The general spectrogram shows prominence in the amplitude of frequencies through a color scale from green to red: green having lower amplitude (and therefore being less prominent), red showing greater amplitude (more prominent). The melodic spectrogram works on a different color scale: purple being less prominent, bright pink being more prominent. The inclusion of the two different spectrograms allows for focus on different aspects of the track in question: the general spectrogram provides a complete capture of the full sonic density of the song, while the melodic spectrogram helps to narrow in on specific melodic ideas and motives that contribute to the track's density.

In the spectrograms of Twain and Aniello's "Swingin'," one can see a clear shift in sonic fullness between the verses and choruses of the track. Such an effect is common in popular music of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In his dissertation "The Sonic Dimension as Dramatic Driver in 21st - Century Pop Music" (University of Michigan, 2016), Asaf Peres notes a shift in standard musical factors used to delineate formal sections in pop music.[32] A recession in importance of harmonic or tonal delineations between verse and chorus highlighted new aspects of music—such as sonic density—as more salient parameters of differentiation between the two formal sections. Additionally, the manipulation of specific sonic qualities through a Digital Audio

[31] I use the term prominence here to indicate the greater amplitude of frequency, given its increased perceptibility—or what is often referred to as "loudness,"—therefore being more defined in the overall texture of the track.
[32] Asaf Peres, "The Sonic Dimension as Dramatic Driver in 21st - Century Pop Music," (dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016).

Workstation (DAW) allowed for a more nuanced control over timbral qualities. The thickening of sonic density in the choruses of songs has thus become standardized by artists and producers to formally delineate between the verses and choruses of a twenty-first century pop song.

Figure 1 shows the general and melodic spectrograms of the opening through the first chorus of "Swingin'." Looking at the general spectrogram (the upper of the two) shows the shift in sonic density between the verse and pre-chorus of this track to the chorus at 0:46. The deeper red and orange along the bottom displays the larger prominence of frequencies in the range of 0–1000 Hz. But more telling still is the greater prominence of upper frequencies as well, which translates to overall fuller sonic density in the chorus compared to the verse.

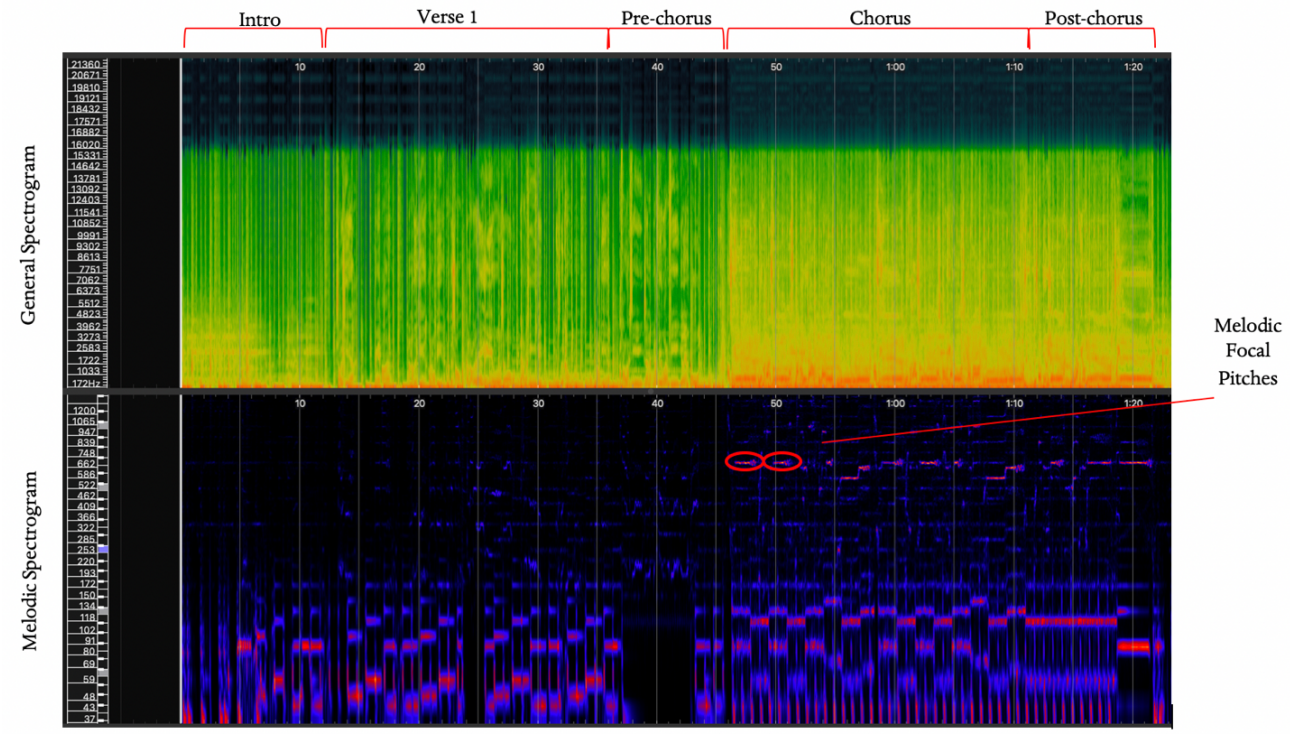

Figure 1 – "Swingin' With My Eyes Closed" intro – post-chorus, Now *2017.*

In order to combat her weakened voice, Twain and Aniello use different recording and production strategies that make Twain's voice sound even stronger. The first of these comes as the

layering of different tracks of the same melodic line atop one another. By double-tracking Twain's vocals, the duo are able to bolster the prominence of the belted focal pitch, which can be seen in the melodic spectrogram of Figure 1 (the lower of the two). The result creates a fuller, more powerful sound that is seemingly coming from Twain's singular voice. This technique is usually only used in the choruses of the song – providing a contrast to the verses – which aligns with the sonic characteristics on modern pop songs previously mentioned by Peres.

Multiple layers of the melodic line is not the only way Twain and Aniello thicken the texture. In addition to this, the background vocals in the chorus provides a sense of strength in numbers, so to speak, especially given that Twain's own voice is included in the harmonies of the background vocals. What results is a thicker vocal texture, that provides affective strength and power in the part of the voices. This particular technique is neither new for Twain, nor other artists in the genres of pop and country, though. Throughout her career, one common musical characteristic present is the thickening of texture by accompanying background voices in the chorus of the song. What is different, however, is that in order to make her melodic focal pitch more present, Twain and producer—in this case, Aniello—have to utilize the multi-layered melodic track in order for the part to feature prominently in the texture.

Compare the spectrogram of "Swingin'" with that of "Man! I Feel…" in Figure 2. In the chorus section of the melodic spectrogram, it is clear to see the presence of Twain's focal pitch in the texture – a texture that also includes supporting background vocals. This presence comes without having to overlay multiple tracks of Twain's vocal line in order for the melody to be prominently heard. There are a few reasons for this, the first of which being that Twain's 1997 voice

was healthy and strong in contrast to her weakened voice in 2017. This allowed her to occupy the timbral space without multiple layers of the vocal track boosting the power of the melodic line.

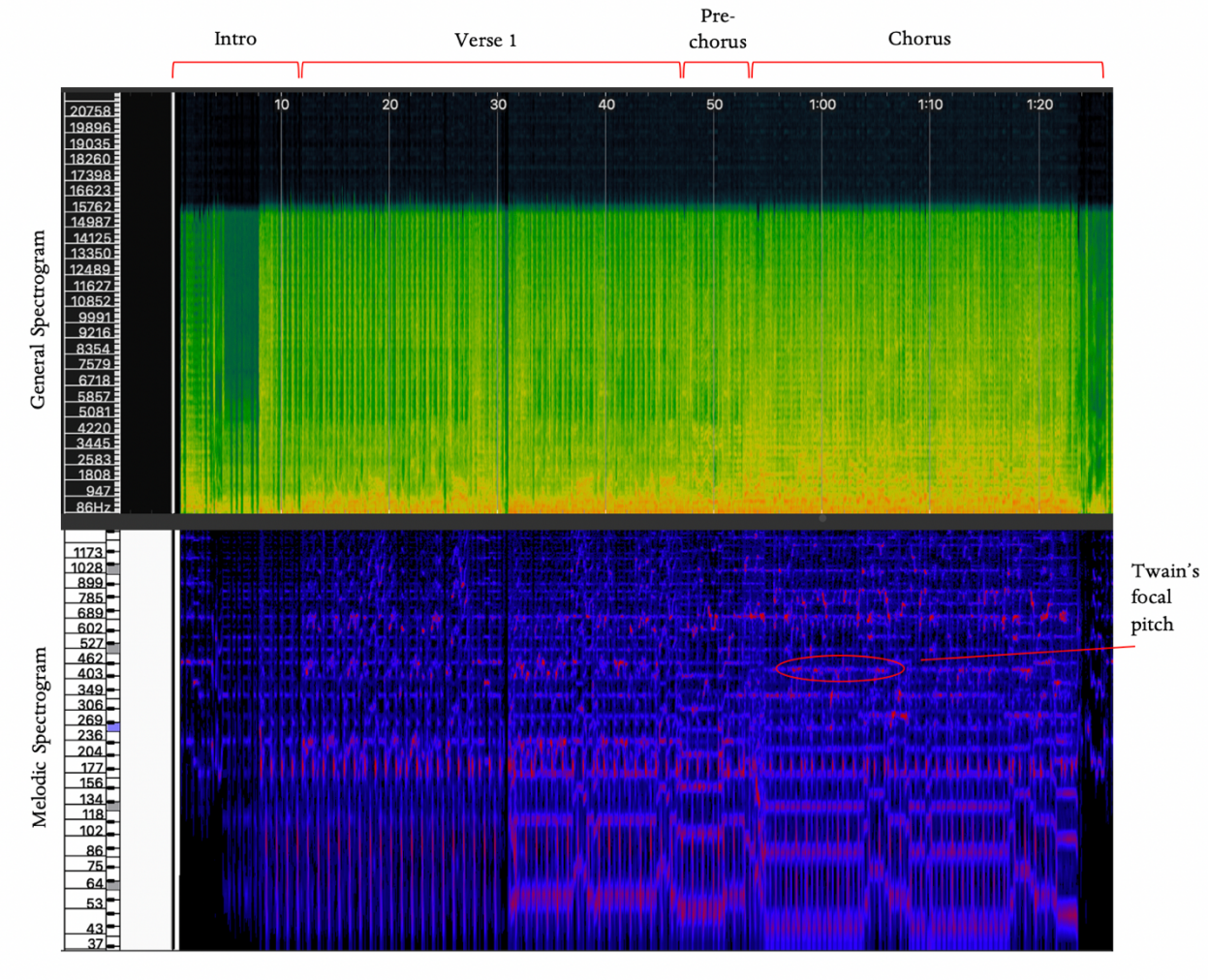

Figure 2 – "Man! I Feel Like A Woman" intro – chorus, Come on Over *1997.*

Shania Twain and Ron Aniello's use of production and recording strategies are a strong example of the ways in which technology can help bolster musicians' sounds. In Twain's case, presbyphonia and muscular deterioration resulting from Lyme disease have left her voice weakened and lowered in register. To combat Twain's struggles to sound vocally powerful and strong throughout a sonically dense texture in the chorus of "Swingin'," she and Aniello multi-layer recorded tracks atop her melodic line to make prominent her voice in the texture. This thicker

texture supports affective strength as Twain's voice delivers the message and power of the song's lyrics, allowing Twain to drive the narrative behind song which is a crucial aspect of country music.[33] All the while, the sonic density of the chorus juxtaposed with its verses places the track toward the popular end of her country-pop generic continuum. A comparative analysis of Madonna's 2019 "I Rise" highlights similar production techniques used to enhance a singer's sound in pop music.

Madonna: "I Rise"

Like Twain, Madonna has faced both praise and criticism for creating genre-bending music that helped her soar into the spotlight as a young performer in the 1980s. After starting as a singer and drummer in local New York City bands, Madonna released her first solo album in 1983 with Sire Records, igniting her career as a singer, dancer, and later as an actress. From there, she continued to record hit records and amass fame through extensive international touring, prompting Billboard to name her the most successful solo artist in the Hot 100 chart history in 2018.[34] In 2019, Madonna released her fourteenth studio album *Madame X* at the age of sixty. Madonna's age at the point of recording (sixty), compared to Twain's while recording her *Now* album (fifty-one), allows for a comparison of the effects of presbyphonia in the female voice. Additionally, the proximity of their respective album releases (Twain's *Now* in 2017 and Madonna's *Madame X* in 2019), provide examples of vocal and studio production techniques used to mask the effects of presbyphonia.

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[33] Jocelyn R. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 29 no. 1 (2007): 41–72.

[34] Xander Zellner, "Hot 100 Turns 60! The Top 60 Female Artists of All-Time, From Madonna to Mariah Carey & More," *Billboard*, August 2, 2018. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/hot-100-turns-60/8468088/hot-100-turns-60-top-60-female-artists-all-time-madonna-mariah-carey-janet-jackson

The closing track of Madonna's 2019 album *Madame X* "I Rise" features similar vocal and studio production techniques to that of Twain's "Swingin'" to combat her weakened and lowered presbyphonic voice. In a manner similar to that of Twain and Aniello, Madonna and her co-producer Jason Evigan thicken the sonic density of the choruses on the track by multi-layering her voice on both the melodic line and the supporting background voices which are also sung by Madonna. The resulting sonic effect is that of strength and support which helps drive the narrative of the track and places itself on the spectrum of the twenty-first century pop song.

The effects of presbyphonia are evident in the change in timbre and range typical of a Madonna chorus that sent her into fame in the 1980's. The melodic focal pitch in the chorus of "I Rise" is a D4, featuring prominent use of Madonna's belt in the upper range of her register to produce the pitch. Compared with the ease with which she produces the focal pitch (G#4) of the title track off her sophomore album *Like a Virgin* from 1984, the lowering in range of her vocal register is clear across the thirty-five-year span. Not only is the pitch lower in range, but her overall timbre has changed as well as a result of the presbyphonia. Often associated with her light, playful tone that drives the narrative behind "Like a Virgin," Madonna's voice rings fuller, resting on the lower partials likely created through the elongation of her vocal folds over time.

Similar to Twain's, Madonna's melodic vocal line is recorded over multiple times to produce a stronger sound. This, in combination with the generous auto-tune used, creates more power to Madonna's line as she repeats the titular line "I rise," because the bolstering provided by the technology becomes perceptually associated with a computer-aided perfection.[35] In addition to the

[35] Simon Reynolds, "How Auto-Tune Revolutionized the Sound of Popular Music," *Pitchfork*, September 17, 2018, https://pitchfork.com/features/article/how-auto-tune-revolutionized-the-sound-of-popular-music/

multiply-recorded melody, Madonna and Evigan further thicken the sonic density in the second chorus of the track with the incorporation of Madonna's voice (still multi-layered) as the background vocals singing a counter-melody. The combined tracks work together to amass a swell of voices that can be perceived as the uniting of numerous people together to persist and rise against the oppression dealt with through the lyrical content of the song.

Additionally, rather than simply juxtaposing the textural thickness of the verses against the chorus of the track, Madonna and Evigan further represent the message of "I Rise" through a gradual increase in sonic density in each subsequent chorus of the track. Figure 3 shows the general and melodic spectrograms for the entirety of "I Rise." Notice the shift in color from green to red on the general spectrogram—the closer to red, the thicker the sonic density of the track. What is evident is the increase in sonic density each time the chorus of the track gets repeated. This increase corresponds to the increasing layers of Madonna's vocal lines (both melodic and harmonic) being added to the texture. These production techniques create two different increasing layers in sonic density—from verse to chorus and from chorus to chorus—that results in a perceptual "rise," further promoting the track's lyrical content.

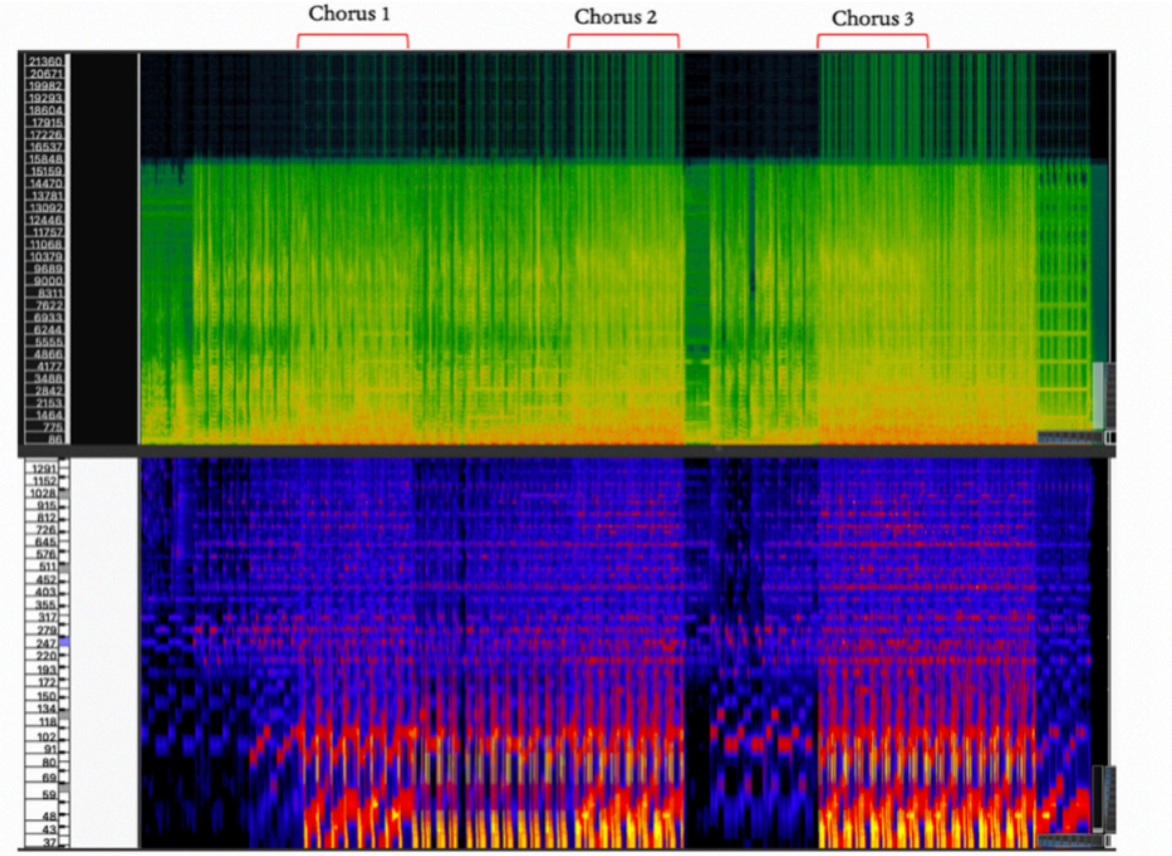

Figure 3 – "I Rise" general and melodic spectrograms

Sound Expectations and Genre

Madonna's track incorporates these production techniques in a way that more smoothly aligns with pop norms, where multi-layering and autotune have been common for some time. However, effects such as these are more readily noticeable on a voice like Twain's, coming from a genre—country—which, until she came on the scene in the 1990's, had rarely incorporated such techniques.[36] A closer examination of Twain's career, though, and at the genre of country music as a whole provides further insight as to why Twain incorporates such effects.

Twain is well-known for embracing musical aspects of the country-pop crossover, often citing her own personal musical influences growing up. These ideas were kept in mind when

[36] Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 394-395.

deciding on which track was to be released as the first single off of a new album. For example, when choosing a lead single for her sophomore album *The Woman in Me*, Twain recalls debate between her and representatives from her record label Mercury Records when selecting the song:

> "My choice for the first single of the album was 'Any Man of Mine,' but it was true that programmers were showing mixed reactions to it, and the record company felt safer going with the more country-flavored "Boots." I wanted to hit them between the eyes with the true blend of genres that I felt best represented who I really was, the variety of childhood musical influences that had shaped my personal taste as a singer-songwriter."[37]

The company ultimately overrode Twain's choice and opted for their own preferred track—a decision she says that she now understands given the industry at the time. When the album was released, this decision was make-or-break for artists who were heavily reliant on radio-time (resulting in record sales) as a contributing factor for their success.

But 2017's *Now* came from a different position for Twain. By this time, she was a long-standing star in the country-pop area. With such stardom comes greater control: Twain chose "Life's About to Get Good" for her opening single. My analysis of the single below will focus on different musical aspects that impact the generic categorization of the track. Firstly, I begin by examining the track's instrumentation. I then turn to how the instrumentation and composition of the song impact the resulting timbral characteristics of the track. These timbral qualities are evident not only in the accompanying instrumentation, but also in the aspects of Twain's vocal production and the production techniques used by her and her co-producers. Together, the musical aspects discussed align "Life's About to Get Good" with country-pop tracks of the time—evidenced through a comparative analysis of Kane Brown and Lauren Alaina's "What Ifs." They also serve to bolster Twain's voice through her presbyphonia.

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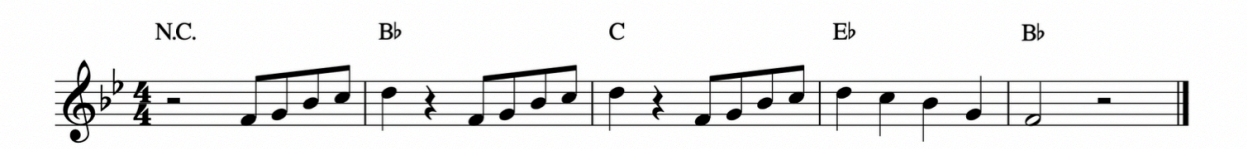
[37] Shania Twain, *From This Moment On* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc, 2011): 268.

"Life's About to Get Good"

A look at the choices in instrumentation for "Life's About to Get Good" help highlight the track's position along the country-pop genre. Specifically, the instrumentation helps differentiate a fuller sound in the choruses of the track, positioning in within Peres's take on a modern pop song, while incorporating instruments commonly associated with the country genre. Take for instance the opening melodic motive that becomes an integral part of the track's accompaniment, which is notated in Example 3. The five-note motive is presented first using keyboard instruments (piano and synthesizer) and electric guitar.



Example 3 – "Life's About to Get Good" motive

The motive returns in the background of each chorus as an accompanying line, this time combining keyboards and electric guitar with background vocals. At these instances, the motive is played in three different octaves, creating a fuller sound that can be seen on the melodic spectrogram in Figure 4. In addition to the opening motive, additional percussive elements coming from electronic percussion and drum set further fills the texture of the choruses. These instrumental choices help align "Life's About to Get Good" with the sonic markers of twenty-first century pop tracks described by Peres.

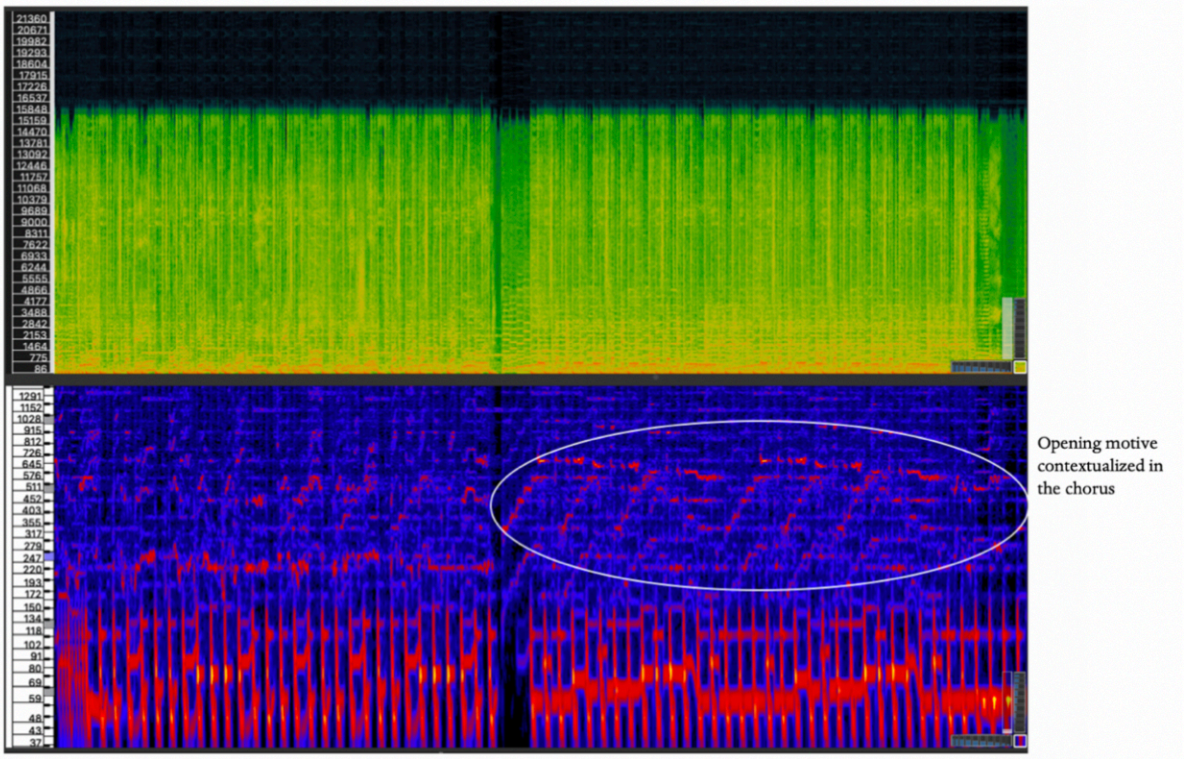


Figure 4 – "Life's About to Get Good" motive, chorus and post-chorus

The verses of the track differ not only sonically, but also in choice of instrumentation. A thinner texture often corresponds to fewer instruments filling the timbral thickness, which is the case in the verses of "Life's About to Get Good." The twelve-measure verses divide evenly in half to form two six-measure groups, gradually adding instrumentation to each group. What results is a thickening of the sonic density over the course of the entire verse, which differs from the immediate stark contrast of the verse and chorus in "Swingin'."[38] Notably, the instrument added to the second half of the verses in "Life's About to Get Good" is the banjo—a clear calling card to Twain's country

[38] Jocelyn R. Neal notes Twain's use of "sonic disruptions" in her songwriting craft that function in a similar way to this in "Swingin' With My Eyes Closed." Here, there is gradual increase in sonic density, followed by a large sonic disruption right before the chorus which makes the chorus feel that much stronger. Jocelyn R. Neal, "Country-Pop Formulae and Craft: Shania Twain's Crossover Appeal" in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. by Walter Everett (Routledge, 2007), 285-311.

roots. The sixteenth note pulse from the banjo accompaniment adds a thickness in the upper partials of the track's overall sonic density. The gradual increase can be seen in Figure 5.

Similar motivic-instrumental relationships are present in other country-pop tracks around the release of Twain's *Now* album. For comparison, consider the top-charting country-pop single at the time of Twain's album release, Kane Brown's "What Ifs," featuring Lauren Alaina. Example 5 depicts the opening acoustic guitar motive of the track with an accompanying electric guitar providing rhythmic support. After an initial introductory presentation, the motive drops out for the first verse of the track in a manner similar to that of "Life's About to Get Good." Whereas Twain's motive returns in the second-half of the verse, the opening motive of "What Ifs" returns in the pre-chorus of the track, intensifying and thickening the texture of the song leading to the chorus. A similar sonic disruption is used to highlight the difference in textural thickness between the chorus and the rest of the track, represented visually through the spectrograms of "What Ifs" in Figure 5. The parallel in musical characteristics between "What Ifs" and "Life's About to Get Good" point at Twain's alignment with the country-pop genre in late 2017.

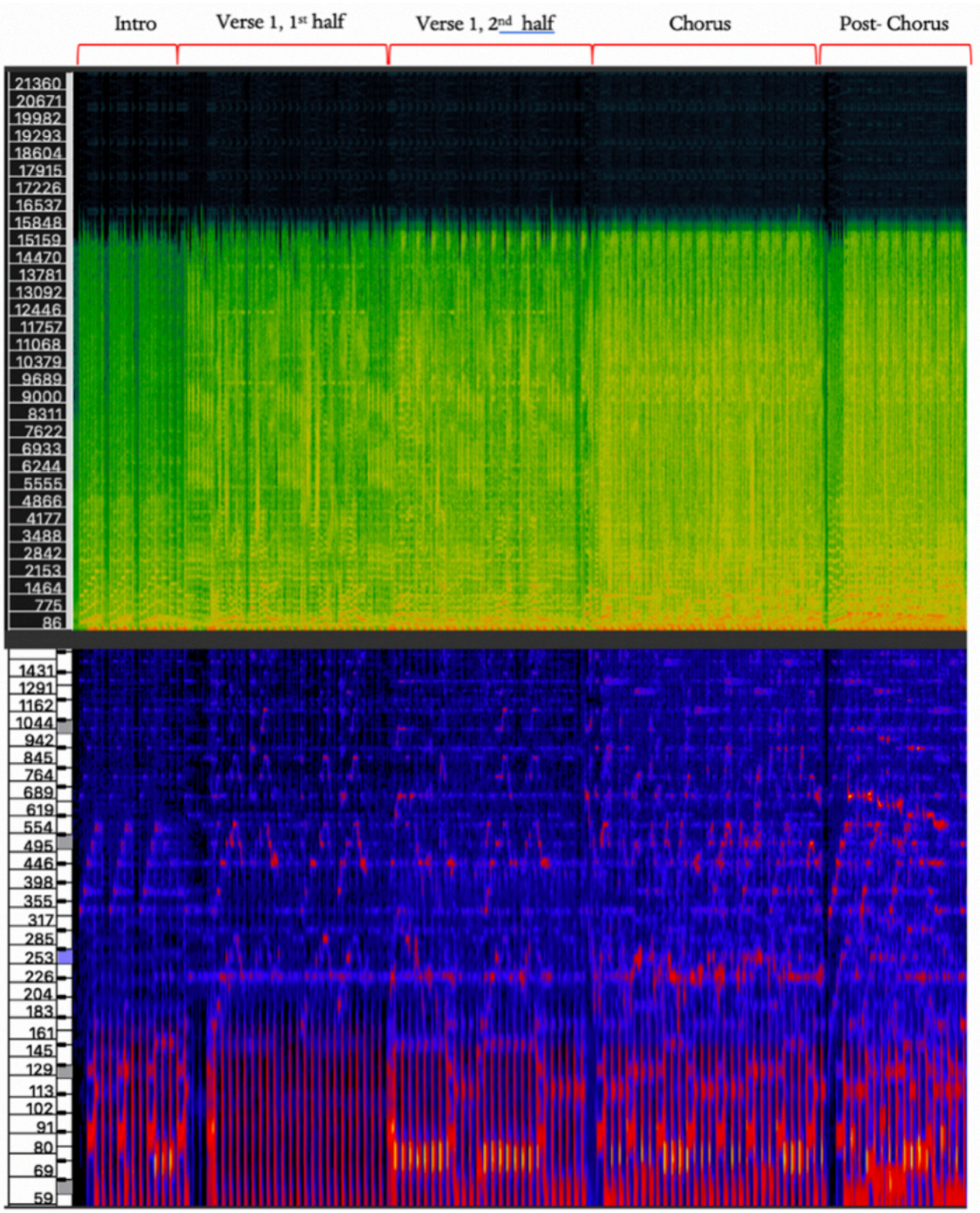
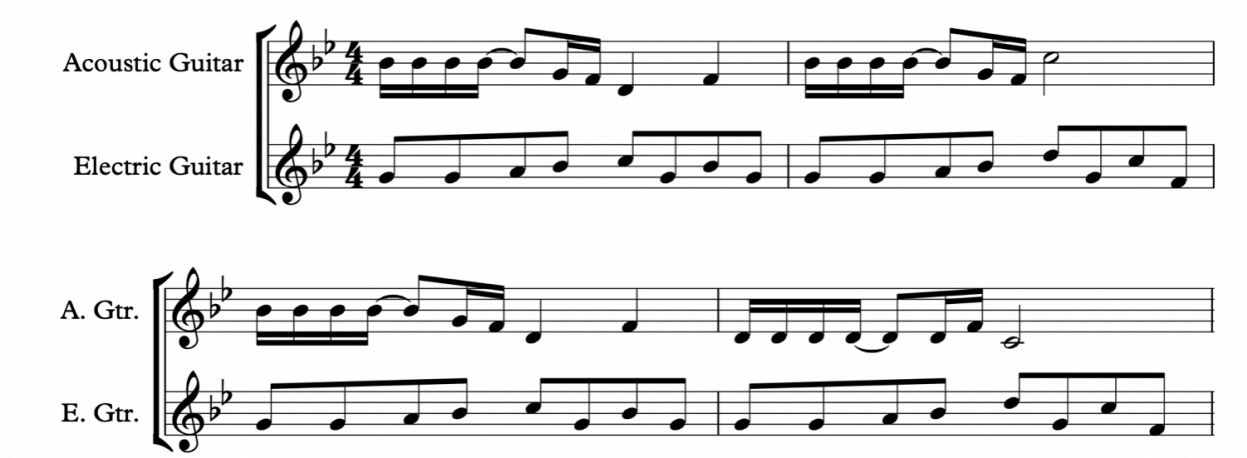


Figure 5 – "Life's About to Get Good" spectrograms, intro–first chorus



Example 4 – "What Ifs" opening motive

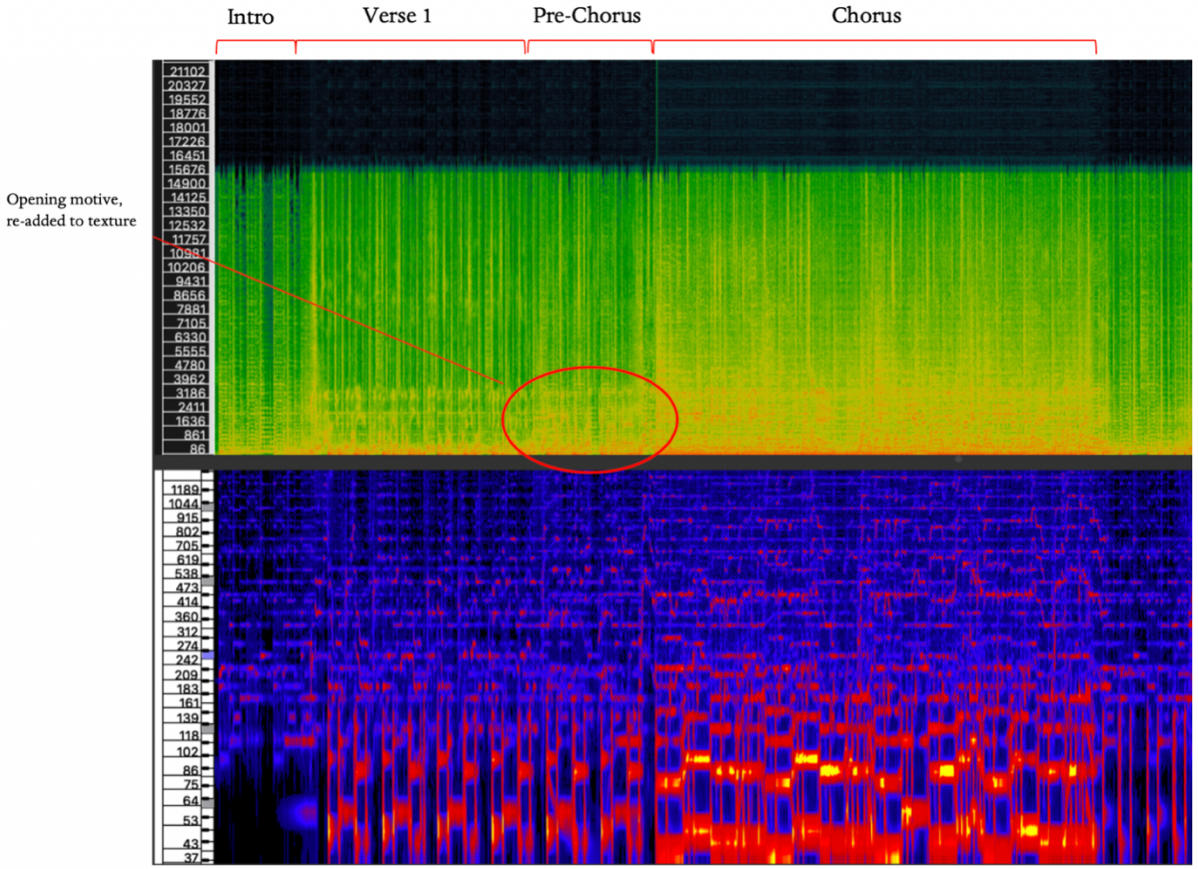


Figure 6 – "What Ifs" general and melodic spectrograms

The instrumentation in "Life's About to Get Good" works in tandem with the choices in production to bolster Twain's weakened voice. Evidence of Twain's presbyphonia can be seen in the track by looking at the melodic range of Twain's vocal line. Recalling Twain's ability from her previous album *Up!* in 2003 it's clear that her prominent belt range is significantly lower on the *Now* album, particularly in this track. The highest instance of belt occurs at 2:41 on the song on the tonic Bb4, which is (enharmonically) a P4 lower than the D#5 mentioned earlier. Even then, the moment is relatively quick, and utilizes heavy vocal effects to create a removed sound, mimicking greater distance from the microphone. These vocal effects, in combination with tense-throated method of vocal production Twain uses to create the sound results in a perceptible weakness of her voice. Also, the melodic focal pitch of the chorus resides down on a D4, moving slightly higher to an F4 in the post-chorus. These melodic markers all present a narrowing in Twain's overall vocal range.

With the addition of a third producer, Matthew Koma, Twain, Ron Aniello, and Koma incorporate similar techniques to the ones describe above with "Swingin'" in "Life's About to Get Good." In terms of production, Twain's melodic vocal line is doubled throughout the choruses of the song, providing more power to her vocal track. The trio also includes background vocals in the choruses of the song. One key factor in the background vocals of the recording of "Life's About to Get Good" (also utilized in "Swingin'") is the incorporation Twain's own voice in the background vocals. The use of her own voice to sing the underlying harmonies driving the melody of the song creates a stronger overall presence of Twain's voice in the chorus.

Additionally, the fuller texture from the recording and vocal production techniques utilized by Twain and her co-producers help drive the narrative impact of "Life's About to Get Good." This track was set to be the first single from Twain after a fourteen-year hiatus from the music industry.

Sticking to the theme of up-tempo, powerful anthem tracks as her lead singles, an interview with iHeart Radio following the release of the single accounts Twain's reason behind choosing this particular track as the first-release from her new album:

> "I chose this as the lead single because, first of all, it's very energizing, and I really felt that I needed to feel that positive energy, first coming back out again after so long. It just puts me in a good mood, and lifts me up, and also reflects on my true state of mind over these last few years that have been challenging. So, the song is about truth, pain, optimism, joy in pain, and it says everything I want to say after being gone so long." [39]

Part of what makes Twain's track "energizing," of course, is the powerful layering and other production techniques used on the track. The multi-layering of Twain's voice, in combination with the overall thicker texture created with the instrumentation choices help create that powerful affect. This is particularly true in the choruses of the track, which feature the descriptors with generally more positive connotations. In the same interview with iHeart, Twain acknowledges the difference between the verses and the chorus:

> "This song is a light at the end of the tunnel story; seeing the optimism. When I first started writing the song, the verses are very melancholy. And on the first lyric, it said, 'I wasn't just broken, I was shattered.' And I was in this spirit of 'boo hoo,' but I was writing it on the beach. So, every time I would pick my head up from my guitar, or my laptop writing the lyrics, I would see this gorgeous water, and sand, and sun, and palm trees, and I thought, wow, life is really great, and I think I'm going to pull this song out of its miserable state, and give it the light at the end of the tunnel. And that was where the chorus came in, you know, 'Life's About To Get Good.'" [40]

[39] "Shania Twain Opens Up About New Song 'Life's About to Get Good | Exclusive" *iHeart Radio*, June 15, 2017, https://www.iheart.com/content/2017-06-15-shania-twain-opens-up-about-new-song-lifes-about-to-get-good-exclusive/

[40] Ibid.

Feminism, Age and Sex Appeal

Recalling Drott's point regarding the multiple lenses through which one should examine an artist or their work for the purposes of cataloguing their generic position, a look at Twain's physical portrayal highlights the ways in which she pushed boundaries of both gender presentation and femininity in country music throughout her career in the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as during her return to the spotlight in the 2010s. However, before examining Twain's career specifically, it is important to acknowledge the context in which Twain was functioning as an artist to fully understand the cultural impact that her displays had on the country music genre, allowing her to further position herself within country-pop. Twain's career aligns with the postfeminist movement (sometimes referred to as third wave feminism), which grew out of the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. While second wave feminism deals largely with the concerns of equality of women and their roles in the workplace (recall the discussion on Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn from earlier), postfeminism focuses on women's self-identification, the individual choices of women, and the work-through and embrace of consequences resulting from those choices.[41] Acting as such, Twain's choices worked to further boundaries of the country genre, while also dealing with societal standards of women as they age.

James Mandrell notes in his essay on the reception of Twain's career in the 1990s and 2000s that her outward displays of "masculine femininity" are juxtaposed with displays of "feminine masculinity" in the form of attractive, clean-cut men who feature regularly in her music videos.[42] See for instance the bottom picture of Figure 7, a still of Twain in her music video for "Man! I Feel

[41] Claire Nally and Angela Smith, *Twenty-first Century Feminism*, (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[42] James Mandrell, "Shania Twain Shakes Up Country Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 5 (2015): 1015-29.

Like a Woman" from 1997. Twain fronts a group of fit men dressed in tightly fitting spandex tops, while she herself sports a black corset and thigh-high boots, topped with a men's starched white collared shirt. Mandrell argues that, while such a juxtaposition is to blame for pushback against Twain and her career from a conservative fan base, it ultimately helped Twain launch her career to even new heights by appealing to a much wider group of audiences.

Figure 7 – top photo: "Life's About to Get Good" music video (2:13), © UMG Recordings, Inc. 2017; bottom photo: "Man! I Feel Like a Woman" music video (1:34), © Mercury Records, 1997.

Twain's performance of gender and femininity in "Man! I Feel Like a Woman" were complex, especially given the video's references to Robert Palmer's 1985 "Addicted to Love" music video. Figure 8 depicts a still from the music video, in which Palmer fronts a band of all women wearing the same well-fitting black dresses, sporting full faces of makeup, resembling that of models in a photoshoot. The women are clearly sexualized and included to be fawned over, presumably from the perspective of heterosexual men. Problematic, too, is the manner in which the women are depicted to be playing the instruments: they are visually off-beat, and their blank expressions present in a way supposing they are unaware of how to play the instruments.

Figure 8 – "Addicted to Love" music video (0:29), © The Island Def Jam Music Group, 1985.

The reversal of these roles in Twain's video contextualizes complexities of gender presentation in the music industry—and, more generally, in media—throughout the 1980s and 90s. Superficially, Twain's feminine sex appeal appears standard: her tight corset, exposed thighs, and

accentuated breasts play into traditionally highlighted feminine features. However, her physical positioning in front of men displayed as femininely masculine, as Mandrell would put it, combined with the men's shirt over the corset, flip notions of traditional gender roles to place her in a guise of masculine femininity. Additionally, Twain displays the male models of the band behind her in a manner similar to that of women in Palmer's video. Such a display, particularly in late-90s country, was quite novel, and aligns itself more with displays of pop stars (Mandrell notes Madonna) at the time.

Twain continued her country-pop presentation in 2017 with the music video for "Life's About to Get Good" in a way that, too, touches on aspects of gender in a societal context, highlighting relations between femininity and age in pop culture. These displays are also more complex than how they appear superficially. For instance, in the music video Twain makes numerous references to some of her past looks, including her outfit for "Man! I Feel Like a Woman," which can be seen in the top photo of Figure 7. In one way, Twain's use of a twenty-year-old referent helps show continuity and strength—she still has the appeal, the skill, and the personality of her thirty-two-year-old self. In another sense, Twain displays even more control over aspects of masculinity by completely removing the men from the scene. In the video, no longer present are the femininely masculine musicians in the background. Rather, they have been transformed to be Twain's red clothes, hung up neatly in a closet filled with Twain's past country ways. Such imagery symbolizes more personal and intimate aspects of femininity—at one point Twain clings on to a fringed cowgirl top being removed from her closet, perhaps symbolizing the critical reception of those divorcing her from the country genre.

The concurrent calling-card to the past in the form of her iconic "Man! I Feel Like a Woman" outfit with the display of feminine control by hanging up the men operate in tandem with the discussion above regarding the vocal and studio production of Twain's sound to make a postfeminist statement. No longer can Twain completely sound the way she once did due to her vocal injuries and presbyphonia. She can, however, still outwardly present the way she did in the 1990s, this time without men in the scene. Such a presentation, however, unfortunately speaks to a double-standard imposed on middle-aged female pop-stars that they are expected to continue looking as youthful as possible. However, the active treatment of her own voice, combined with her overall visual presentation of twenty-first century femininity, evidence Twain's position as both postfeminist and forerunner in the genre of country-pop. Additionally, the way Twain embraces her critical reception through the symbolic removal of the fringed top from her closet aligns with postfeminist ideals. Through these choices, Twain actively participates in an ongoing dialogue on what it means to be a crossover artist—here, between the genres of country and pop. The agency Twain exhibits therefore inherently allows for conversations such as this to be had, which pertain to discussions of musicology and music theory, as well as wider philosophical concerns of gender presentation and feminism over the last thirty years.

Conclusion

Twain and her career embody Drott's notion of musical genre: she actively partook, and continues to partake, in the multiple cultural facets that define her place in the musical catalogue. My analysis highlights the parts of Twain's musical career—her personal life, her visual appearance and representation, and the timbral aspects of her country-pop sound—as they intersect within this

unique album as well as relating to the larger musical industry. The results show that Twain has portrayed herself in a way that impeccably demonstrates an artist within the actively modeled, fluid genre of country-pop music. Her musical stylings continue to come from what appears as a place of conscious intent, gathering inspiration from those around her in a way that represents a postfeminist frame of mind. Additionally, Twain actively engages as a musical artist in the country-pop genre by embracing timbral qualities of vocal production and instrumentation afforded to her as she embraces the intersectional facets of her life. The ways in which Twain has played with sound color and timbre over the course of her career leaves much to be addressed analytically. For instance, a specific look at the timbral distinctions between the different versions of her *Up!* album, as well as the different ways in which Twain performed live music based on geographical location are just two examples of how the examination of the intersections of timbre and genre can point to larger discussions of music and culture. My discussion on Shania Twain and timbre—specifically vocal timbre—contributes toward such an effort.

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